

# Birmingham City Council

## Report to Cabinet

20 April 2021



**Subject:** Bid to Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) - Supported Housing Oversight Pilots 2020/2021

**Report of:** Director of Neighbourhoods (Acting)

**Relevant Cabinet Member:** Councillor Sharon Thompson, Cabinet Member Homes and Neighbourhoods

**Relevant O &S Chair(s):** Councillor Penny Holbrook, Housing and Neighbourhoods Overview & Scrutiny Committee

**Report author:** Guy Chaundy, Senior Service Manager Housing Strategy

Are specific wards affected?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No – All wards affected
If yes, name(s) of ward(s):		
Is this a key decision?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, add Forward Plan Reference: 008675/2021		
Is the decision eligible for call-in?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, state which appendix is exempt, and provide exempt information paragraph number or reason if confidential:		

### 1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 On 13<sup>th</sup> October 2020 Cabinet approved the bid submission to the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for the 'Supported Housing Oversight Pilots 2020/2021' along with 4 other Local Authorities (Blackburn, Blackpool, Bristol and Hull).

- 1.2 The original grant allocation from MHCLG for 6 months up to 31st March 2021 was £1,048,000. There is a carry forward of this grant due to slippage of £500,000, which has been allowed by MHCLG.
- 1.3 The total cost of the 2nd phase Bid is for £756,000 taking the overall funding to £1.804m. A breakdown of the 2nd phase proposal expenditure is contained with the application in Appendix 1. This will be fully met from the Pilot funding from MHCLG which also includes for programme management costs.
- 1.4 We will continue to explore with MHCLG any opportunities for further extensions should there be further slippage.
- 1.5 As the Prospectus and notification for the second pilot phase was issued on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021, with a submission deadline of 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021. Cabinet are asked to therefore approve the bid submission and receipt of any awarded grant retrospectively.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Cabinet approves the bid submission to MHCLG in Appendix 1 at a value of £756,000 and acceptance of funding from MHCLG for the pilot activity for Supported Exempt Accommodation as described in the submission.
- 2.2 Authorises the City Solicitor (or their delegate) to negotiate and complete any agreements to give effect to the above recommendation.

## **3 Background**

- 3.1 In Birmingham the growth in exempt accommodation has been increasing significantly since 2017. The last 12 months have seen the sharpest increase in the amount of supported exempt accommodation claimants with over 20,000 in payment in February 2021 compared with 14000 in November 2019. The range and quality of this accommodation varies and at its worst, provides poor support to some of the most vulnerable people living in our city.
- 3.2 The highest majority of exempt accommodation claimants are living in Housing Association accommodation, much of which has materialised over the last few years, with private landlords building up portfolios of leased and owned accommodation and then applying for registered provider status, exempting them from licensing regulations.
- 3.3 The scale and nature of the accommodation is causing problems for neighbourhoods and communities as well as reducing the available accommodation for families. As supply outstrips local need, Landlords continue to market vacancies and seek referrals of vulnerable people from well beyond the City's boundaries, bringing people with support needs to Birmingham where they are remote from their natural support networks and without the support infrastructure to cope.
- 3.4 The accommodation is trapping some of the most vulnerable people in some of the poorest accommodation with inadequate support, unable to take up employment or

with any pathway to move on. There is also a concerning prevalence of housing providers linked to organised Crime Groups (OCGs) which in turn exacerbates the vulnerability of their tenants

3.5 In the first Pilot period up to April 2021, the Birmingham model proposed six main objectives from the pilot:

- Improve the quality and standard of exempt accommodation in Birmingham through the roll out of the Birmingham Quality Standard and a multi-disciplinary team who will undertake a regime of inspections.
- Ensure citizens are safeguarded and supported to effectively build their capability and autonomy.
- Empower citizens living in exempt accommodation through effective communication and roll out of the charter of rights developed by Spring Housing
- Codesign a partnership led strategic plan for the use of exempt accommodation in Birmingham.
- Investigate and prosecute Organised Crime Groups in the exempt accommodation sector as part of a partnership commodity - based approach
- Undertake an evaluation of effective interventions and initiatives.

Although we are still currently working on the first phase of the pilot and formal evaluation is still to take place there has been good progress in some areas including over 130 responsive inspections despite Covid, a Complex Case review team investigating links to organised crime, undertaking Benefit reviews for over 30 providers, support in raising standards,. A partnership 'Operational Tasking Group' is meeting 3 times a week to review key cases on a multi-disciplinary level, focussing on key providers and key wards and work has begun on a Strategic Needs Assessment and the Quality Standards and Charter of Rights has now been formally launched.

3.6 One area that has not been able to be delivered to the extent originally planned due to Covid-19 restrictions is the proactive inspection activity and this will be a key element of focus for the additional funding and timeframe.

3.7 MHCLG have recognised the impact Covid-19 restrictions has had on delivery of the current Pilot and have, as recently as 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021, released a prospectus for a 6 month extension to the Pilot from April to September 2021.

3.8 The additional areas of activity proposed in the second pilot phase are detailed in the bid submission in Appendix 1. In summary this will allow, subject to any further Covid-19 restrictions, a wider roll out of inspection activity to deliver improvements in property and support provision within the supported housing sector in the city. Including training for providers, action planning on a new supported housing strategy and related governance arrangements. This will link directly with the expansion of the Quality Standards accreditation scheme and Charter of rights.

## **4 Options considered and Recommended Proposal**

- 4.1 The only alternative option is to not bid for/accept the additional pilot funding. This sector is growing at a rapid rate and dealing with the issues within the non commissioned supported housing sector is a key priority in a number of areas of the city. By not increasing the resource capacity this will prevent us from carrying out the required interventions.

## **5 Consultation**

- 5.1 The relevant Lead Cabinet Members have been consulted, Councillor Paulette Hamilton Adult Social Care, Councillor Brigid Jones Deputy Leader and Councillor John Cotton Social Inclusion, Community Safety and Equalities
- 5.2 Homelessness Partnership Board, Chair of the Community Safety Partnership Board, Independent Chair of the Birmingham Adult Safeguarding Board and the Exempt Accommodation working Group which consists of partners and stakeholders have all been consulted and supportive of the bid.
- 5.3 All Cabinet Members, Overview and Scrutiny Chair and stakeholders consulted are supportive of the bid and recognise the importance of securing the additional resource into the City to start to tackle this agenda

## **6 Risk Management**

- 6.1 The key risk will be that the pilot is only for a further 6 months, key resources are already mobilised and the use of agency inspection resources will be sourced quickly. Existing governance structures are already in place to provide oversight and delivery i.e. Sponsor Board, Pilot delivery group and operational tasking.

## **7 Compliance Issues:**

- 7.1 How are the recommended decisions consistent with the City Council's priorities, plans and strategies?

Outcome 4: Birmingham a great City to live in:

- We will have the appropriate housing to meet the needs of our citizens, this decision will directly support the council in driving up accommodation standards in the private sector and the in the care and support to some of its most vulnerable citizens.

### **7.2 Legal Implications**

- 7.2.1 Local housing authorities have a statutory duty under Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 to keep the housing conditions in their area under review with a view to identifying any action that may need to be taken by them under a number of statutory provisions. The Local Authority also has duties under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 to provide emergency and interim

accommodation for vulnerable households, as well as a duty to provide an advisory service and to formulate a homelessness strategy.

7.2.2 Under Section 17 Children Act 1989 the Council has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need.

### 7.3 Financial Implications

7.3.1 The total cost of the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase Bid is for £756,000 taking the overall funding to £1.796m. A breakdown of the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase proposal expenditure is contained with the application in Appendix 1. This will be fully met from the Pilot funding from MHCLG which also includes for programme management costs.

7.3.2 We will continue to explore with MHCLG any opportunities for further extensions should there be further slippage.

### 7.4 Procurement Implications

7.4.1 There are external partners listed in the bid proposal who currently support this agenda. Officers will work with procurement colleagues with regards to securing that ongoing input. The strategy development will be subject to a tender exercise, alongside some internal officer support.

### 7.5 Human Resources Implications

7.5.1 There will be a need to recruit to necessary positions at pace not currently in place. This will be achieved through a mixture of agency and backfill, use of existing partners and fixed term contracts.

### 7.6 Public Sector Equality Duty

7.6.1 Equality Assessment is contained within Appendix 2. The interventions proposed will seek to improve provision of non-commissioned supported accommodation and support for some of the most vulnerable individuals in the city.

## 8 Appendices

- Appendix 1 – MHCLG prospectus and bid submission
- Appendix 2 - Equality Assessment (to follow)

## 9 Background Documents

- 9.1 'Exempt Accommodation Report' findings – Birmingham Adult Safeguarding Board and Birmingham University.
- 9.2 Cabinet report of October 13<sup>th</sup> 2020, supported housing oversight pilot